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AUTHOR Atkin, Charles K.; Gantz, Walter
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ABSTRACT

This study provides evidence of the basic parameters of elementary school students' viewing of national, local, and children's news programing. About half of the children studied regularly watched the special Saturday morning newscasts, while almost half watched adult news programing at least occasionally. News viewing increased steadily from kindergarten through fifth grade. A small number of children expressed positive evaluation of the Saturday "In the News" segments and a much smaller group strongly preferred adult news. Communication about news events with parents and friends is somewhat related to viewing; however, there is little evidence of parent-child similarities in actual exposure behavior. Demographically, sex is the major determinant of news viewing, as boys watched considerably more news programs than did girls. Assuming that exposure is either a sole or a reciprocal causal agent, the following tentative conclusions can be suggested: television news exposure produces moderately increased levels of knowledge about political affairs and popular events and persons; exposure to television news produces moderately increased levels of interpersonal discussion of news with peers and parents; and it stimulates perhaps half of the children to seek additional information. (SW)

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CHILDREN'S RESPONSE TO BROADCAST NEWS:

EXPOSURE, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING

By

Charles K. Atkin
Walter Gantz

Department of Communication
Michigan State University

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CHILDREN'S RESPONSE TO BROADCAST NEWS: EXPOSURE, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING

Despite hundreds of research studies examining television and children, hardly any data exist concerning news viewing behavior. Most investigators have concentrated on effects of entertainment programming, since children devote most of their viewing time to cartoons, situation comedies, and adventure shows (Atkin, Murray, and Nayman, 1971).

Adult-oriented news programs are shown at a time when most children are near the television set. Although the content is aimed well above the elementary school level, it is possible that young people do watch and learn from these newscasts. Furthermore, the 1971 television season inaugurated a new concept in news presentation: specially designed spot news broadcasts for child audiences. The innovative CBS "In the News" programs are displayed for two minutes every half-hour on Saturday mornings.

This study seeks to provide evidence of the basic parameters of elementary school students' viewing of national, local, and children's news programming. Some of the basic determinants of news exposure will be examined, along with the nature of effects of this viewing experience. First, relevant evidence from the television research literature is reviewed.

Learning from television -- Since television is considered primarily as an entertainment medium, few researchers have explored the informational aspects of television for children. Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) suggest that most of the child's learning from television is "incidental learning" that occurs when the child views television for entertainment purposes and absorbs certain informational items. They found that general television exposure contributed to an increased oral vocabulary in the first grade and

higher scores on specialized vocabulary tests dealing with "timely and topical words like satellite, war, and cancer." However, the advantage accruing to viewers did not appear among the older age groups, leading these researchers to propose that heavier viewing of entertainment programming leads to a fast start in learning which does not persist beyond age 6 or 7.

The recent successes with educational programs such as Sesame Street and Electric Company indicate the potential information-giving capacity of home television. The Ball and Bogatz (1970, 1973) reviews of Educational Testing Service data show that young children who watch Sesame Street and Electric Company the most tend to learn the most, particularly those basic skills that were given the greatest emphasis. Furthermore, the greatest viewing and learning takes place among children whose mothers view the show and discuss the content with them. However, children's educational programs are not current and newsy, since they are intended to be relatively "timeless" and reusable over a period of years (Sarson, 1971).

Other evidence of television's informational impact on the very young comes from Stein and Friedrich (1972), who found strong correlations between the frequency of exposure to Misterogers Neighborhood, Batman, and Superman, and preschoolers' scores on content tests dealing with characters and incidents featured on these programs. Lyle and Hoffman (1972) also discovered that most preschool children could readily identify pictures of key characters from their favorite television programs.

In addition, the effectiveness of television as a tool for classroom teaching has been well documented. Chu and Schramm (1967) examined more than 400 studies comparing conventional and television teaching methods, and found that the vast majority of the studies showed no significant

differences; among those investigations that found one method more effective than the other, television teaching had a slight advantage. In general, if motivation can be kept up, a child can learn as much from a televised as a face-to-face lesson. Classroom television is most popularly received at the elementary school level.

Exposure patterns to television news -- Lyle and Hoffman (1972) found that children in the first, sixth, and tenth grades seldom watched the adult newscasts, and fewer than 1% rated news programs among their four favorite shows. The authors suggest that the low exposure rates were due to the availability of competing entertainment content on other stations during the dinner news hour in the southern California market studied.

McLeod, Atkin and Chaffee (1972) reported that 30% of the sixth grade students "often" watched national news broadcasts, and 40% often watched local news. Boys were much heavier news viewers than girls. McIntyre and Teevan (1972) found that half of their junior high school sample watched the news at least two or three times. Males watched more than females, and blacks more than whites. There were no social class differences.

A study by Chaffee, McLeod and Atkin (1971) indicated that the viewing behavior of the parents may have a significant influence over the child's exposure patterns. They found moderate correlations between the amount of news viewed by the parent and the sixth and seventh grade child, with a stronger association between child and mother than child and father. In addition, the data showed that news viewing was negatively related to total television viewing time and positively related to newspaper reading. This suggests that the child's use of television for information on current events may be mostly a function of his interest in news rather than the availability of the televised news fare.

Information gain from television news -- Data presented by Robinson (1972) shows that adolescents who viewed network and local news programs achieved slightly higher scores in identification of people in the news. In addition, those who watched the weather programs tended to have greater knowledge of principles implicit in television weather forecast presentations.

The impact of television news and public affairs programming on political learning is reviewed by Atkin and Greenberg (1974). In one key study, Chaffee, Ward and Tipton (1970) found that adolescents who watched more news programs scored higher on political knowledge tests, both synchronously and six months later. Using self-report measures, Dominick (1972) found that junior high school students most often cited television over other media and interpersonal sources of information about the president, Congress, and Supreme Court.

There is almost no evidence relating to younger children, however. When Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) asked elementary school children whether they thought that home television helped them in school, more than two-thirds indicated that it was useful for studying topics such as current events.

The single-exposure nature of many televised news stories may inhibit learning by younger children, however. After reviewing the literature on preschoolers' learning from television, Stevenson (1972) concluded that youngsters "retain only a very small part of what they see after a single viewing." Although young children may acquire certain skills and slogans from repeated exposure to educational concepts and commercials, it is unknown whether they can learn from limited exposure to news stories.

Interpersonal communication -- Exposure to television news may stimulate the child to discuss news events with his peers and parents, or anticipated conversation about news topics may lead the child to seek out news shows in

order to subsequently transmit or discuss the key stories. Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) discovered that sixth graders in a town served by television tended to discuss the news twice as often as those in a town that had no television reception. Atkin (1971) found that high school students in an experimental condition where they anticipated discussing national current events were more heavily exposed to television news than students who did not expect such discussions.

In sum, the research literature says little about the incidence of children's news exposure or the amount of learning that is derived from television news programs. However, studies on other types of television content indicate that children do have the capacity to acquire information from this primarily entertainment medium.

METHOD

This report involves only the survey portion of the overall television news project. Other phases of the investigation involve laboratory manipulation of news content and field experimentation with context of naturalistic news viewing.

Three basic sets of survey data were gathered in April and May, 1973. Questionnaires were administered to 703 elementary school students in kindergarten through fifth grades. A subsample of 240 students in one school were also administered two supplementary questionnaires measuring previous-day viewing behavior. Finally, a randomly selected subsample of 236 mothers of students were interviewed by telephone after the in-school survey.

Survey Questionnaire: To obtain a representative yet convenient sample of elementary school children, three schools in the central Michigan area were

selected for the main survey. One school in downtown Lansing represented a working class, urban, and partially black neighborhood; a school in southwest Lansing represented a primarily middle class, suburban neighborhood; and a school in Eaton Rapids represented a small town-rural area.

Thirty-to-forty minute questionnaires were administered in classrooms at each school. Children in the fourth and fifth grades filled out the questionnaires by themselves, with proctors assisting those having questions. Since these children were able to write, questions dealing with knowledge about news events were open-ended in many cases. Younger children received a slightly abbreviated questionnaire featuring multiple-choice items. In the first through third grades, proctors read each question and set of responses aloud to full classrooms or half-classes of students while other aides circulated through the room to help those with problems. The kindergarten children filled out questionnaires in groups of three or four in a semi-interview setting. The data-gathering procedures appeared to be both efficient and adequate for obtaining the appropriate data. The use of many graduate assistant proctors (several from child development programs) and carefully designed questionnaire wording and graphics improved the quality of measurement for these difficult age groups.

A number of variables were measured in the questionnaire. The items tapping news viewing behavior are described in the results section and tables. Other key indices and constituent items are described here.

Political knowledge -- Before preparing items dealing with the political environment, a content analysis was conducted for "In the News" subject matter over the previous five months. The questions that were constructed reflect basic themes, personalities, or long-term news developments featured

both in adult and children news programming. The knowledge questions either asked a verbal question or posed a question about a picture printed on that page. Younger children could choose from among three alternatives; older children were asked both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. These are the items for the younger children:

> Three pictures of President Nixon were accompanied by these questions:
> "What is the name of this man?" (Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Spiro Agnew)
> "What job does this man have?" (Senator, King, President)
>
> A picture of U.S. Prisoners of War in North Vietnam was accompanied by this question: "Here is a picture of two men who were in prison during the war. What is a person called when he is captured by the enemy?" (Congressman, POW, soldier)
>
> 'This year there has been a lot of news about the Watergate trial. Who were the people who got caught in the Watergate?" (spies, killers, policemen)
>
> "Which country signed a peace treaty with the U.S. last winter?" (Argentina, Ireland, North Vietnam)

These are the items for the older children:

> A picture of President Nixon taking the oath of office was accompanied by these questions: "What is the name of this man?" (open ended)
> "What job does he have?" (open ended)
> "What are these people doing in this picture?" (open ended)
>
> A picture of Henry Kissinger talking with Mao Tse-Tung was accompanied by these questions: "In this picture, the man with his finger in the air is named Mao. What country does he come from?" (open ended)
> "The man with the glasses is from the United States. What is his name?" (open ended)
>
> "In what city is the Capital of the United States?" (open ended)
>
> "Which country signed a peace treaty with the U.S. last winter?" (open ended)
>
> "What is the name of the mayor of Lansing?" (Clifton Wharton, Charles Chamberlain, Gerald Graves)
>
> The POW and Watergate items were repeated from the younger children's questionnaire.

Popular knowledge -- General awareness of events in the news was tapped by a similar set of questions. The content dealt with "In the News" topics of a non-political nature. Here are the younger children questions:

> Two pictures of events at Wounded Knee were accompanied by this question: "A group of Indians have been fighting the U.S. government for many weeks in South Dakota. What is the name of the town they are in?" (Wounded Knee, Pontiac, New York)
>
> A picture of recent midwest flooding was accompanied by this question: "Here is a picture of a town that is under water. What is it called when a river rises up and flows into people's houses?" (tornado, avalanche, flood)
>
> "What thing makes the most pollution in the air?" (trains, cars, factories)
>
> "A few weeks ago, Americans stopped buying one kind of food because the price was too high. What kind of food did they stop buying?" (meat, eggs, butter)
>
> "Pablo Picasso died last month. What job did he have?" (painter, football player, singer)

For older children, these items were used:

> "Pablo Picasso died last month. What job did he have?" (open ended)
>
> "Are women allowed to have abortions in Michigan" (yes, no)
>
> The Wounded Knee, flood, meat boycott, and air pollution items were repeated from the younger children's questionnaires.

Weather knowledge -- The older children only were asked two questions about the general nature of weather:

> "When the weather man says that it will be a hot day, how many degrees will the temperature be?" (90 degrees, 60 degrees, 30 degrees)
>
> "When the weather man says that there will be precipitation, what will happen?" (open ended)

Interpersonal communication -- To determine the extent to which interpersonal discussion of news events relates to news exposure, these three questions were asked of all respondents:

"Do you talk with your friends about things in the news?" (yes, no)

"Do you talk with your mother about things in the news?" (yes, no)

"Do you talk with your father about things in the news?" (yes, no)

Information-seeking -- A single item measured whether news exposure stimulated the child to seek further information from other sources. This is the question wording:

> "After you watch a story in the news, do you ever try to find out more about it -- like looking in a book or asking someone questions?" (yes, no)

Topical interests -- To determine the extent to which personal interest relates to news exposure, three questions gauged attraction to international, national, and local news events. THese questions were asked only of older students:

"Are you interested in the things that the President does?" (yes, no)

"Are you interested in the things that happen in other countries?" (yes, no)

"Are you interested in the things that happen in Michigan? (yes, no)

Demographics -- On the final page of the questionnaire, children were asked to indicate their age, sex, and school performance: "How good do you do in school -- how good are the grades on your report card?" (very good, pretty good, not so good). They also provided their name and their home telephone number.

Mother Interviews: In an attempt to contact a one-third sample of mothers, telephone numbers were randomly selected from the child questionnaire forms. In cases where two or more children from the same family attended the school, one name was randomly selected as the focal point for the interview. Almost all mothers who were called cooperated in the fifteen-minute interview. Many of the questions paralleled those items in the child questionnaires, while

others sought information from the mother's unique perspective. The wording of these measures will be described as encountered in the results section.

Diary Subsample: In the suburban school, the basic questionnaire was supplemented by two brief diary instruments administered several days before and after the main session. The purpose was to obtain concrete evidence of actual viewing behavior on the previous day, beyond the generalized measures in the basic questionnaire. On a Tuesday, the students were asked (a) to report which cartoons and "In the News" programs they saw the previous Saturday from a list of all programs, and (b) to report on the previous day's television viewing before, during, and after the airing of local and national news programs. On a Thursday, the local and national news reports were obtained again.

FINDINGS

This report presents descriptive univariate results from children's questionnaires and mothers' interviews, along with bivariate data describing how viewing behavior relates to other independent and dependent variables. More sophisticated analyses will be reported in subsequent papers.

Television News Exposure: How much do children view news programming on television? The answer depends on which source and measurement techniques one relies on. When asked for generalized reports on news viewing, the children tend to give high estimates; when the questions refer to concrete recent viewing experiences, somewhat lower levels are reported by the children; when mothers are asked to describe their children's general exposure, even more conservative figures are obtained. The actual amount of news exposure probably lies somewhere between generalized levels reported by the

mothers and the specific daily reports of the children. While the generalized self-reports are most likely inflated, these measures should be useful for correlational purposes; assuming that the rate of overestimation is fairly constant across subgroups of children, valid comparisons of viewing behavior can be made across ages, sexes, races, interest levels, etc.

Adult news -- In the overall sample of elementary school students, 36% claim that they watch the national news programs "almost every day," with an additional 34% indicating that they watch "sometimes." Due to considerable variability in news exposure by age level, these basic data are most profitably examined. There is a general tendency for exposure to increase as children become older. Table 1 presents the findings for three groupings by grade in school. Daily viewing of national news increases from 24% among Kindergarteners-First graders to 36% among Fourth-Fifth graders. The Pearson correlation between frequency of viewing and grade level in school is +.15.[1]

Another source of viewing data is the "yesterday diary" administered to the subset of children at two points in time. The bottom half of Table 3 displays the findings for national news, averaged across the two evenings referred to in day-after questionnaires. The diary listed the programs shown from 5 p.m. - 7:30 p.m., with these instructions: "Here is a list of some programs that were on TV yesterday. Make a mark to show how much you watched each program yesterday." They could report watching "all", "some", or "none" of each program. All together, 42% viewed national news, with Walter Cronkite (on the nearest station) attracting the most viewers. Most of the viewers were exposed to only some of the news; just 17% said they saw all of a national news program.

Local news programs are also widely viewed by young people. The generalized self-report questions dealt with viewing and liking for the news, weather,

and sports portions of the typical six o'clock report. Across all grades, 32% say they watch the news part "almost every day." Table 1 shows that the proportion of heavy viewers does not increase appreciably with age; the correlation is only +.04. By late elementary school, exposure to local and national news is approximately equivalent, while viewing appears to be more widespread in the lower grades.

As with national news, the mother reports are much more conservative. Just 13% say their child watches daily, although an additional 32% indicate at least occasional viewing. Unlike the child reports, the data from mothers shown in Table 2 suggests increases in exposure all through elementary school. The correlation of local news viewing and age is +.20, quite similar to the national news association with age.

The children say they watch even more weather and sports news. Weather is most heavily viewed, with 39% viewing "almost every day" and 39% watching "sometimes." There is substantially more exposure in the older age groups. Daily sports viewing is indicated by 31% of the students, and 43% see the sports some of the time. These levels are fairly constant throughout elementary school.

Diary data presented in Table 3 show that an average of 32% viewed the news portion of the six o'clock local report on the previous day. This is less than saw the weather (45%) and sports (36%). In addition, viewers paid less attention to the hard news segment than either the weather or sports. Less than half of those exposed to the news portion said they viewed "all" of it.

Aside from frequency and amount of viewing, several items sought to tap preferences for various types of news content. Mothers of news viewers were asked an open-ended question about their child's preferred news topics:

"what sort of news stories does your son (daughter) seem to be most interested in?" Leading the list with 25% mentions is news of catastrophies, such as accidents, floods, and fires. Mentioned by 24% of the mothers is science news, particularly space shots. Hard news of national scope is cited by 15%; this includes stories about Watergate and the economy. Next comes sports (14%), human interest (13%), and local (8%) news. Least frequently cited is international news, such as war stories, which 5% of the mothers mentioned. Younger children prefer catastrophy stories, while older children like sports and national news.

To determine local newscast preferences, children were asked "which part is your favorite?" Most popular is sports (48%), followed by weather (34%) and news (18%). There is a slight tendency for older children to choose the news part at a higher rate, while sports is somewhat less often preferred in the later grades.

As might be expected, news programming is not nearly as attractive to elementary school children as is entertainment programming. Students were given three choices after the question, "which one of these TV programs do you like the most?" The news finished far behind a situation comedy (I Dream of Jeannie) and a cartoon (Flintstones), with only 5% most liking the news.

Viewing of Children's News: According to child self-reports, 48% watch the Saturday morning "In the News" programs "a lot," and an additional 29% view "sometimes." Table 1 shows a sharp increase between Kingergarten-First grade and Second-Third grade subgroups. The correlation between grade and exposure is +.23.

Reports of actual exposure on two previous Saturdays are available from the diary subsample; since all students completed questionnaires on Mondays,

the total sample provided additional diary data for a single Saturday. Exposure was measured for twelve separate news segments across the two designated Saturdays. Rate of viewing ranged from 20% for a story about Lebanese oil refinery fires to 38% for a story about the annual change to daylight savings time. On the average, viewership was 30%, with Kingergarteners-First graders viewing at a 19% rate and Fourth-Fifth graders viewing at a 36% rate. Exposure is almost as high for serious news events as for feature stories; for instance, 35% viewed a Watergate news item and 30% saw an analysis of car fumes and air pollution. Among lighter stories, 38% viewed a story about panda bears in the zoo and 27% saw a feature on the national fiddle convention.

Three-fourths of the mothers say that they are aware of their child's Saturday morning news viewing behavior. When asked "how much attention does your child seem to pay to these Saturday morning newscasts...would you say close attention, some attention, or little attention?", 56% indicate close attention and 34% say some attention. Close attention increases from 45% in the youngest age group to 60% among older children. A follow-up question asked, "do you think your child understands these Saturday newscasts, or are they too complicated for him (her)?" Just 10% feel that the programs are too complicated, 16% say that the stories are occasionally complicated, and 74% report that their child usually understands the newscasts. Predictably, the rate of perceived understanding rises from 65% to 83% between younger and older age groups. Most mothers feel that these newscasts are designed for children in late elementary school and middle school. In response to the question, "in general, what age group do you think these news shows are for?", 25% think that the lower limit is first grade or less, 14% say second grade, 25% indicate third grade and 16% suggest fourth grade or above. As far as

the upper age limit, 25% indicate sixth grade or less, 16% say seventh or eighth grade, and 40% estimate ninth grade or above. The remaining mothers were not sure about appropriate age ranges.

Evaluations of "In the News" were also obtained from the children. The programs are fairly well received, as 34% indicate that they like the newscasts "a lot" and 44% like them "a little." The age breakdowns in Table 4 show greater liking in the later grades. The children are generally satisfied with the amount of news presented on Saturday mornings; 32% indicate that the network should continue broadcasting the same number of newscasts, while 32% desire more news and 36% hope for less news. Table 4 shows that the younger children tend to want less news between their Saturday cartoons. The age differential in news preference is reflected in the students' estimates of the target audience: Kingergarteners-First graders tend to feel that the newscasts are intended for older children, while the older children feel that the programs are aimed at their age groups.

While children are repetitively exposed to commercials, they do not have an opportunity to see the newscasts more than once. One question measured their reaction to the number of times the news should be presented; 53% are satisfied with the current format, while 47% would like to have the news stories shown twice. Data in Table 4 indicate that these preferences do not differ systematically by grade in school.

Predictors of News Exposure: This section of the paper examines the antecedent or concommitant variables that are associated with news viewing behavior. Three child self-report measures of news viewing are used: the national news item, the local news item, and a children's news index composed of the "In the News" item and total number of actual newscasts viewed the previous

Saturday morning. Predictor variables are primarily child self-report measures, supplemented by mother reports where no child measure is available.

Table 5 shows that children who like news programs watch most heavily. An index of liking was derived from these previously discussed items: rating of the local news segments as the favorite part of six o'clock report; rating of news as the favorite type of television program; liking for "In the News; and desire for more "In the News" programs on Saturday mornings. This index correlates in the +.30's with all three types of news viewing.

Exposure to other television news programming also correlates with the three news variables, as those who watch the weather and sports tend to view hard news, and those who watch one type of hard news tend to watch the other types. On the other hand, exposure to an educational television program (Electric Company) is not associated with news viewing. Exposure to news in other media is modestly related to TV news exposure, with newspaper reading a slightly stronger correlate than radio news listening.

The extent to which the child discusses news with family and friends is related to news viewing to a moderate degree. Almost identical correlations are found in the mother report data regarding discussion and news viewing; 79% of the mothers say yes when asked "do you every talk with your child about things in the news?", and this correlates in the +.20's with mother reports of child news viewing behavior. However, there seems to be little direct modeling of parental viewing, as only slight correlations are found between child viewing and either mother or father exposure to national news.

Several factors are surprisingly unrelated to news viewing: interest in current events is correlated only slightly; school performance is actually negatively correlated to a minimal degree; race and social class are not related to overall news exposure.

Two factors are associated more strongly than might be expected. Boys view the news consistently more than girls (Table 6) and heavier television viewers see more news than light viewers (Table 7). Both findings are substantiated by correlations based on the mother report data.

The extent to which general television viewing leads to news exposure is of particular interest, since it indicates that sheer opportunity may be a key predictor of news viewing. Although the differences between heavy and light viewers in Table 7 are not overwhelming, the pattern is clear. Other evidence points to the role of viewing inertia in producing news exposure. An analysis of the pattern of viewing between 5 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. for two sample evenings shows that an average of 67% of the children saw a western (Wild Wild West) immediately preceding the local news, and 61% watched a situation comedy (I Dream of Jeannie) immediately following the national news. Similarly, Saturday morning diaries indicate that an average of 71% of the children saw those cartoon programs surrounding "In the News." Thus, many of the news viewers may be in the audience merely because the television set remains on between their favorite entertainment programs. Conversely, lack of opportunity may inhibit news viewing; there is a -.15 correlation between local and national news exposure and extent to which the mother says that TV news interrupts the dinner schedule (54% of the mothers say that news is missed at least sometimes, in answer to the question "sometimes people miss the TV news because it interferes with dinner. How often does this happen in your family?")

Effects of News Viewing:

For many of the correlates of news exposure, it is difficult to identify the causal variable; for several pairs of variables, each may produce changes in the other in a reciprocal fashion (Atkin, Galloway and Nayman, 1974).

For instance, interest in current events may lead children to watch news programs in order to satisfy their curiosity; exposure to news may in turn produce heightened interest in events covered in the broadcasts. This section will focus on four key variables which may be considered as dependent variables at least partly affected by news exposure: current events knowledge, interpersonal news discussion, information-seeking, and public affairs interest. Since each of these can also be considered as independent variables at least partly affecting news viewing, the findings will be presented in terms of descriptive relationships rather than treating viewing as the primary causal agent.

Current events knowledge: Indices of political and popular knowledge were computed separately for the older (fourth and fifth grade) and younger (kindergarten-third grade) children because of different forms of questions for each group.

An Overall index combining political and popular knowledge provides the basic measure of current events information level. The strongest predictor of knowledge is grade in school: fifth graders score higher than fourth graders on their knowledge items; within the younger group, there is a correlation of r.44 between grade and knowledge. Respondent characteristics such as race, sex, school performance and social status are unrelated to knowledge in the younger age group, but moderate correlations emerge among the older children: blacks score lower than whites (r=+.25); higher status children are more knowledgeable than those from lower class backgrounds (+.24); boys know more than girls (+.19), especially regarding political affairs; and those who do well in school display more knowledge than less able students (+.17). Thus, subgroup differences in current affairs information-holding seem to develop as children move through middle elementary school.

Both national news viewing and Saturday morning news viewing should contribute to knowledge; the content of local news programs was not well represented on the indices. For older children, Overall knowledge correlates +.26 with national news exposure and +.17 with Saturday children's news exposure. The associations are +.14 with national news viewing and +.15 with Saturday news viewing for the younger age group. Since several of the child characteristics may be producing a slightly spurious relationship, these variables are statistically controlled in all subsequent analyses. Table 8 displays the partial correlations between viewing and knowledge, with grade, sex, race, and school performance taken into account. (In addition, the partialling on grade in school allows analyses across the combined sample of older and younger children). The results show that the viewing-knowledge associations are slightly diminished when these factors are controlled.

For a subsample of 235 children, child viewing measures were obtained from mothers as well as the children. These were combined with the children's self-reports to form broader indices of national and Saturday news exposure. The partial correlations between mother-child indices and Overall knowledge are quite similar to the partials based on self-report data, reinforcing the results obtained from the children alone.

Table 8 also breaks down the Overall index into political and popular knowledge. National news exposure is related moderately to political knowledge (+.23) for the older children, but not for the younger group (+.03). Popular knowledge is less closely associated with national news viewing, although modest partials are obtained at both age levels. Modest associations between Saturday news viewing and both types of knowledge are found for older children, while only slight relationships are discernable for the younger group. Thus, both types of knowledge are related to news exposure to a similar degree, and the associations are generally stronger for the older students.

The differing strength of relationship between the two age levels is a prime example of conditional association, where a correlation is obtained primarily in one subgroup and not in another. Conditional partial correlations between viewing and knowledge were computed at different levels of numerous antecedent and intervening variables, yielding some interesting patterns of findings. The exposure-knowledge relationship is of equal strength for both boys and girls, and for both brighter and duller students. On the other hand, middle class children show a stronger relationship than working class children. Children who score above average on the news liking scale display a closer relationship than those who don't like news programming; children with above average interest in public affairs have a greater viewing-knowledge relationship than those who are less interested. Assuming that a causal flow does occur from news viewing to knowledge, it can be inferred that certain subgroups in the audience do learn more when they are exposed: the older, middle-class children who are interested in public affairs and like televised news presentations derive the most information during viewing. On the other hand, children who are younger, working-class, less interested and less enchanted with TV news may learn very little from exposure to a news program.

Interpersonal news discussion: News viewing is likely to facilitate interpersonal communication about news events, and anticipated conversations may stimulate news exposure. Items asking about news discussions with peers, mother and father were combined to form an Overall discussion index.

Grade in school is again the strongest predictor variable, correlating +.30 with the Overall index. As children get older, they are particularly likely to increase discussions with peers (r=+.31), while mother (+.23) and father (+.14) conversations are less strongly related to grade. There

are only weak associations with race, sex, academic performance and social status. Again, these factors are controlled when examining the relationships between viewing and discussion of news.

Table 9 presents the partial correlations, which show uniformly moderate relationships for all three types of news programming. The self-report viewing measures for the full sample and the mother-child viewing reports from the subsample are similar for the Overall index. The general pattern indicates that communication with peers is slightly more closely tied to news viewing than are parental discussions.

The mother-child subsample also provides a broader measure of news discussion between mother and child, as both were asked whether such communication occurs. When the five control variables are partialled out, this index correlates +.19 with national news viewing, +.18 with local news viewing, and +.15 with Saturday news viewing.

Information-seeking: Exposure to news programming may stimulate the child to seek further information from interpersonal or media sources. The children were asked, "after you watch a story in the news, do you every try to find out more about it -- like looking in a book or asking someone questions?" Overall, 40% replied in the affirmative, with a sharp increase from 25% at the Kindergarten-First grade level to 51% for Fourth-Fifth graders. Mothers answered a parallel question, "we also want to find out whether or not these Saturday news programs stimulate children's curiosity. Does your son (daughter) every try to get more information about something he (she) has seen on the news...either from you or someone else, or from books or magazines?" The 65% who said yes were asked how often this happens: 5% say "almost everyday", 15% "several times per week", 26% "once per week," and 19% "less than that."

The self-report measure is modestly correlated with amount of self-reported news viewing, with partial correlations of +.13 for national and local news and +.08 for Saturday morning news. The mother-report measure which is tied to Saturday morning news programming has a partial correlation of +.10 with her report of the child's attention to Saturday morning news. An index combining the mother and child information-seeking items yields partial correlations of +.06 for national news viewing, +.11 for local news viewing, and +.07 for Saturday morning news viewing. Thus, children who watch more news tend to seek more information afterwards, compared to those viewing less news programming.

Public affairs interest: The older subgroup was asked three questions concerning their personal interests in foreign, national, and statewide topics. It was anticipated that news exposure might produce more interest in the subject matter described in newscasts, and that interests would lead to more viewing. An index combining these three topics has a partial correlation of +.13 with national news viewing, +.11 with local news viewing, and +.15 with Saturday morning news viewing. The strongest associations are found for interest in Presidential affairs. Thus, the child's topical interests are modestly related to news viewing behavior, although the magnitude of association is not impressive.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory study represents the first comprehensive attempt to measure the patterns of exposure and effects of television news programming among young people. Although it is difficult to obtain reliable data from elementary school students, some tentative conclusions can be drawn from this initial survey.

About half of the children regularly watch the special Saturday morning newscasts, while almost half watch adult news programming at least occasionally. News viewing increases steadily from kindergarten through fifth grade.

A substantial minority of the children express positive evaluation of the Saturday "In the News" segments, and a much smaller group strongly prefer adult news. These news fans are the heaviest viewers of news programs. There is some tendency for a news-seeking syndrome, since moderate positive associations are found among exposure to various types of news presentations on television, radio, and newspapers.

Communication about news events with parents and friends is also somewhat related to viewing; however, there is little evidence of parent-child similarities in actual exposure behavior. Sheer opportunity seems to contribute substantially to news exposure, since news viewing requires little effort for those spending much time with entertainment programming.

Demographically, sex is the major determinant of news viewing, as boys watch considerably more than girls. Racial and socio-economic class background are not associated with exposure.

Inferences concerning the effects of news viewing are difficult to draw in a single shot survey, due to doubts about the direction of causality for variables associated with viewing. This study is currently being extended into a panel design, with a subsample of respondents re-interviewed in a second wave one year later. Assuming that exposure is either a sole or reciporcal causal agent, several tentative conclusions can be suggested at this time: (a) TV news exposure produces moderately increased levels of knowledge about political affairs and popular events and persons; (b) exposure to TV news produces moderately increased levels of interpersonal discussion of news with peers and parents; (c) news viewing stimulates perhaps

half of the child audience to seek additional information, and this tendency is slightly increased as amount of news exposure increases; (d) news exposure produces modestly increased levels of interest in public affairs.

In sum, young children do not restrict their concentration only to entertainment programs when they watch television. Children see much news programming, and they tend to learn and talk about the content that they observe.

FOOTNOTE

[1]When the mothers were asked this same basic question, only 8% say that their child views "almost every day" (Table 2). An additional 37% indicate that their child watches at least sometimes. While the absolute levels of exposure are much lower than the child estimates, the steady increase by age is again apparent. According to the mothers, 13% of the Kindergarteners-First graders watch at least "a couple times a week" while 37% of the Fourth-Fifth graders see the news that often, a correlation of +.24.

The mothers of children who did view the national news were asked how much attention they paid to the news. The children are by no means uniformly attentive: 23% of the mothers observe their children paying "close" attention, 53% say "some attention", and 24% indicate only a "little" attention. Close attention rises from 7% to 28% between the earlier and later school grade categories; the correlation between attention and grade in school is +.23.

TABLE 1

EXPOSURE TO TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMING, BY GRADE IN SCHOOL

News Program	K - First (N=159)	Second-Third (N=253)	Fourth-Fifth (N=291)
"How much do you watch the national news program (like Walter Cronkite or John Chancellor)?"			
Almost every day	24%	29%	36%
Sometimes	29%	38%	35%
Almost never	47%	33%	29%
"There are three parts to the local news program at supper time. First comes the news, then the weather, and last the sports. How much do you watch the news part?"			
Almost every day	31%	30%	34%
Sometimes	35%	41%	39%
Almost never	34%	29%	27%
"How much do you watch the short news programs (IN THE NEWS) that are shown between the cartoons on Saturday mornings?			
A lot	34%	49%	56%
Sometimes	27%	29%	30%
Almost never	39%	22%	14%

TABLE 2

EXPOSURE TO TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMING, BY GRADE IN SCHOOL (MOTHER REPORTS)

News Program	K - First (N=53)	Second-Third (N=90)	Fourth-Fifth (N=93)
"Does your son (daughter) ever watch the early evening news programs on TV? IF YES: About how often would you say that he (she) watches the national news, like Walter Cronkite or John Chancellor?... almost every day, a couple times a week, or less than that?"			
Almost every day	4%	8%	11%
Couple times a week	9%	14%	26%
Less than that	16%	20%	21%
No -- never	71%	58%	42%
IF YES: "And how often does he (she) watch the local six o'clock newscast ....almost every day, a couple times a week, or less than that?"			
Almost every day	6%	18%	12%
Couple times a week	17%	11%	34%
Less than that	6%	13%	12%
No -- never	71%	58%	42%
IF YES: "When your child watches the national news, would you say he (she) pays close attention, or some attention, or little attention?"			
Close attention	7%	21%	28%
Some attention	72%	47%	53%
Little attention	21%	32%	19%
	(N=14)	(N=38)	(N=53)

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TABLE 3

ACTUAL VIEWING LEVELS FOR NATIONAL AND LOCAL NEWS PROGRAMMING[1]

PROGRAM	AMOUNT VIEWED		PROPORTION OF VIEWERS WATCHING WITH PARENTS
Local News	all	14%	
	some	18%	63%
	none	68%	
Weather	all	22%	
	some	23%	72%
	none	55%	
Sports	all	22%	
	some	14%	61%
	none	64%	
Walter Cronkite news	all	12%	
	some	20%	70%
	none	68%	
John Chancellor news	all	1%	
	some	8%	56%
	none	91%	
Howard K. Smith news	all	4%	
	some	5%	63%
	none	91%	
Total national news	all	17%	
	some	25%	67%
	none	58%	

[1]Figures represent average percentages from two separate days of diary-keeping. Total national news proportion is lower than sum of the three individual programs due to viewing of more than one program the same evening. Subsample N=240.

TABLE 4

REACTIONS TO SATURDAY MORNING NEWS PROGRAMMING, BY GRADE IN SCHOOL

Reaction Item:	K - First (N=159)	Second-Third (N=253)	Fourth-Fifth (N=291)
"How much do you like *In The News*?"			
Like a lot	23%	37%	36%
Like a little	33%	39%	54%
Like not at all	44%	24%	10%
"Do you think they should show more or less news programs on Saturday mornings?"			
Show more	31%	33%	32%
Show the same number	24%	31%	47%
Show less	45%	36%	21%
"Do you think that these Saturday news programs are supposed to be for kids your age, or for older kids, or for younger kids?"			
Younger kids	19%	14%	16%
Kids my age	38%	53%	63%
Older kids	43%	33%	21%
"Right now, they show each news story once. Do you think this is the right number, or should they show a story twice so you can watch it again?"			
Show it once	53%	46%	58%
Show it twice	47%	54%	42%

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TABLE 5

PREDICTORS OF EXPOSURE TO NEWS PROGRAMMING

Predictor Variable	National News	Local News	Children's News
Age of child	+.15 *	+.04	+.23
Sex of child (male-female)	-.17	-.03	-.22
Race of child (white-black)	-.01	-.01	+.05
Family socio-economic status (M)	-.09	+.01	+.12
School performance	-.06	-.02	-.01
Interpersonal discussion of news	+.24	+.22	+.18
Liking for news programming	+.32	+.30	+.35
Interest in current events (O)	+.11	+.11	+.11
Exposure to Electric Company	+.00	+.01	+.02
Amount of television viewing time	+.14	+.08	+.20
Exposure to radio newscasts	+.14	+.16	+.03
Exposure to newspaper front page (O)	+.14	+.25	+.11
Father's exposure to national news (M)	+.06	+.07	+.01
Mother's exposure to national news (M)	+.07	+.16	+.06
Exposure to sports news	+.28	+.19	+.19
Exposure to weather news	+.34	+.29	+.20
Exposure to national news	----	+.46	+.27
Exposure to local news	----	----	+.15

* Table entries are Pearson r correlations between amount of news viewing and each predictor variable, scored from lowest to highest levels. News viewing is reported by the child; predictor variables are reported by the child, except where an (M) indicates mother reports. The two variables identified by an (O) were measured only for the older children. N=703 for most correlations; N = 235 for mother reports and N=291 for older children reports.

TABLE 6

EXPOSURE TO TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMING, BY SEX OF CHILD

News Program	Male (N=356)	Female (N=347)
"How much do you watch the national news program (like Walter Cronkite or John Chancellor)?"		
Almost every day	35%	23%
Sometimes	36%	37%
Almost never	29%	40%
"There are three parts to the local news program at supper time. First comes the news, then the weather, and last the sports. How much do you watch the news part?"		
Almost every day	33%	30%
Sometimes	38%	41%
Almost never	29%	29%
"How much do you watch the short news programs (IN THE NEWS) that are shown between the cartoons on Saturday mornings?		
A lot	54%	39%
Sometimes	25%	33%
Almost never	21%	28%

TABLE 7

EXPOSURE TO TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMMING, BY AMOUNT OF TV VIEWING

News Program	Heavy (N=341)	Light (N=362)
"How much do you watch the national news program (like Walter Cronkite or John Chancellor)?"		
Almost every day	35%	27%
Sometimes	35%	36%
Almost never	30%	37%
"There are three parts to the local news program at supper time. First comes the news, then the weather, and last the sports. How much do you watch the news part?"		
Almost every day	35%	29%
Sometimes	37%	42%
Almost never	28%	29%
"How much do you watch the short news programs (IN THE NEWS) that are shown between the cartoon on Saturday mornings?		
A lot	55%	43%
Sometimes	27%	30%
Almost never	18%	27%

Table 8

PARTIAL CORRELATIONS BETWEEN NEWS VIEWING AND CURRENT EVENTS KNOWLEDGE

Exposure variable	Overall Knowledge	Political Knowledge	Popular Knowledge
National news (self-report)	+.18	+.16	+.13
Younger children	+.09	+.03	+.10
Older children	+.22	+.23	+.15
National news (mother-child report)	+.14	+.12	+.07
Saturday children's news (self)	+.12	+.09	+.10
Younger children	+.08	+.06	+.07
Older children	+.15	+.12	+.14
Saturday children's news (mother-child)	+.12	+.07	+.14

Table 9

PARTIAL CORRELATIONS BETWEEN NEWS VIEWING AND NEWS DISCUSSION

Exposure variable	Overall Discussion	Peer Talking	Mother Talking	Father Talking
National news (self)	+.21	+.16	+.17	+.15
National news (mother-child)	+.17	+.21	+.09	+.10
Local news (self)	+.19	+.17	+.17	+.11
Local news (mother-child)	+.15	+.21	+.09	+.06
Saturday children's news (self)	+.15	+.16	+.12	+.06
Saturday children's news (mother-child)	+.16	+.18	+.14	+.06

Note: Self-report partial correlations control grade, sex, race, and scholastic performance for full sample N=703. Mother-child partials also control social status, and include only the subsample N=235 where measures of child exposure were obtained from both the mother and the child.

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